

## IMPACT OF PLAY THERAPY INTERVENTION ON THE BEHAVIOR OF PHYSICALLY DISABLED CHILDREN OF THE AGE 7-12 YEARS

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### ABSTRACT

This exploratory study describes the impact of play therapy intervention on the behavior of physically disabled children of the age 7-12 years. The literature review examined effectiveness of play therapy on physically disabled children. The purpose of this study is to decrease behavioral and emotional difficulties of children. The study explored effects of play therapy on the behavior of physically disabled children. Fifty teachers of special education and twenty five parents of physically disabled children were selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed by percentage method. It was found that play therapy is helpful to resolve behavioral problems like hyperactivity, aggression and shyness etc. The findings will be helpful for developing interpersonal relationship of physically disabled children and promotion of play therapy in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Impact; Play Therapy; Intervention; Behavior; Physically Disabled Children

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## Introduction

Play therapy is helping interaction between a trained adult and a child in order to relieve the child's stress. It is a structured, theoretically based approach of therapy. Play therapy uses the normal communicative and learning processes of children (Carmichael, 2006; Landreth, 2002; O' Connor & Schaefer, 1994). Play therapy intervention is a good approach for the children who have behavioral problems and cannot express their feelings and thoughts by themselves. Through play therapy children feel comfortable and show their understandings to the others. The setup of play therapy is arranged according to special needs of physically disabled children. It is equally beneficial to normal children as well as special children.

Hermine Hug- Hellmuth (1921) was the pioneer therapist who used play with children. She developed the method of play therapy but used it only for the analysis purpose. She also observed three main points of the play therapy: the difference between clients, the unwillingness of the child for the therapy, and the child's suffering being from the present rather than the past experiences (Carmichael, 2006; Landreth, 2002). Play therapy is a planned activity which is given by a trained play therapist who makes a special and safe environment for the child. The responsibility of play therapist is to diagnose special concerns of behavioral issues because the child is not able to express feelings and thoughts by him/her self. By the help of play therapy the child's growth and development build in the right manner and lead to a re- establishment of balanced senses. The association of play therapy defines play therapy as follow:

“The systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development”(Association of play therapy, 2008).

The role of the parents in play therapy is to establish an atmosphere of free play. It means that parents have to take a very unusual attitude towards the child. For that purpose parents should not engage in these activities: criticism, praise, suggestion or advice, questions, interference, information, teaching, and initiating new activity. The bottom line is that parents give opportunity to the child where he/she sets the values and judgments and most important part

for the parents is that they should full involve with the child's activities and observe with full concentration their feelings and thoughts.

Often, families of physically disabled children show less contribution to children behavioral problems. Parents show disappointment, resentment, and over attention with respect to their disabled offspring, siblings may feel ashamed and guilty about their resentment (Margrab & Calcagno, 1978). The resulting family configuration inhabits and distorts emotional growth. According to an interesting report Lussier (1980) discussed, a physically disabled child's primary problem was parental rather than their disability. The society emphasis on physical beauty and strong healthy bodies which is a big problem of physically disabled children. Many research studies focus on the attitudes of others towards disabled people, and many investigators have found that the disabled people are viewed less favorably than nondisabled (Donaldson, 1980).

Physical disability has frequently been linked with feelings of inferiority, shame, guilt, bitterness, envy, and self pity; although no one attitude is invariably exhibited by the disability, they are commonly seen to be immature and to be subject to primitive fixation and stereotyped activities (Greenberg, 1974). Physically disabled children may have behavior problems due to many factors like biological factor, psychological factor and social factor etc.

In Pakistan there are not much institutes practicing play therapy because play therapy is an expensive therapy, it cannot be afforded easily but some institutes are practicing play therapy and they have effective results. Ultimately play therapy is an effective intervention for a broad range of children's problems –across both behavioral and humanistic schools of thoughts in various setting, across modalities, age and gender. There are many different studies focusing on the effectiveness of play therapy but we also need better designed studies on play therapy to resolve behavioral problems.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of play therapy is a focus point to the upcoming researches. By the help of research studies parents, educators, policy makers, administrators will be able to resolve specific behavioral problems of physically disabled children.

The study was designed to investigate the impact of play therapy intervention on the behavior of physically disabled children of the age 7-12 years.

### Objectives of the Study

- To explore the different types of behavior problems faced by physically disabled children.
- To find out the effect of play therapy on behavior of physically disabled children.

### Research Questions

- What will be significant effect on behavior of physically disabled children by play therapy?
- Are physically disabled children usually associated with behavior problems?

The scope of the study was limited to the physically disabled children aged 7 to 12 years

### Methodology

The study uses descriptive research method along with quantitative research approach. The populations of the study were special teachers and parents of physically disabled children. The overall sample size was fifty teachers of special education and twenty five parents of physically disabled children were selected through purposive sampling. The researcher designed structured questionnaires in the light of literature review with 24 close ended items to special teachers and 10 close ended items for parents. Questionnaires were reviewed by four experts in the field of special education. This procedure ensured the content validity. After minor grammatical corrections and rephrasing, questionnaires were modified. The researcher applied it to a pilot sample of (10) teachers and (4) parents of physically disabled children from two special schools in Karachi to find out the opinion of teachers and parents regarding impact of play therapy on behavior of physically disabled children of the age 7 to 12 years from the study with a one-week period between the test and the re-test. The reliability of the test was calculated using correlation coefficient and it was appropriate for conducting such a study. After data collection, teachers'

data were analyzed through percentage method. Teacher's data represented by bar graph while parent's data represented by pie graph.

**Results**

**Figure 1**

**Effects of play therapy to reduce behavioral problems in physically disabled children**

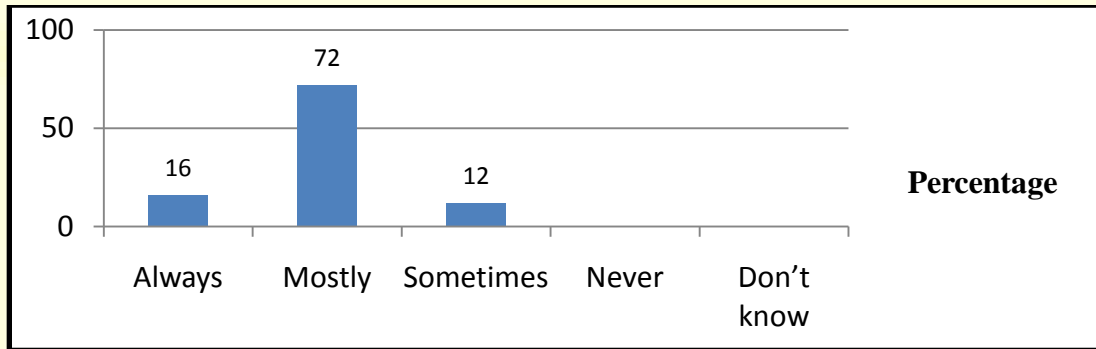


Figure No. 1 shows majority (72%) teachers said that mostly play therapy is effective to reduce behavioral problems in physically disabled children, 16% said always and (12%) said sometimes.

**Figure 2**

**Using play therapy for physically disabled children having behavioral problems**

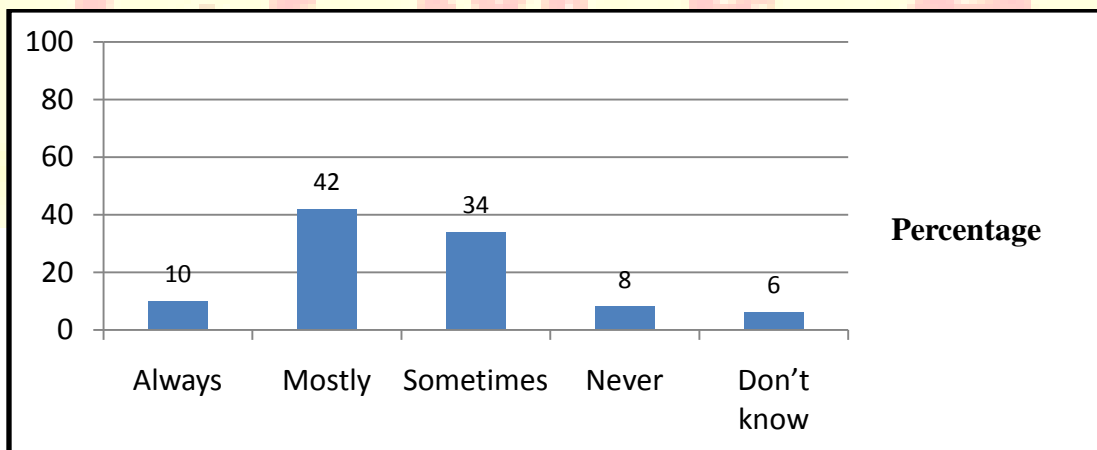


Figure No. 2 shows majority (42%) teachers said that mostly play therapy is using for behavioral problems in physically disabled children, 34% said sometimes, 10% said always, 8% said never and (6%) did not know about it.

**Figure 3**

**Effects of play therapy in physically disabled children**

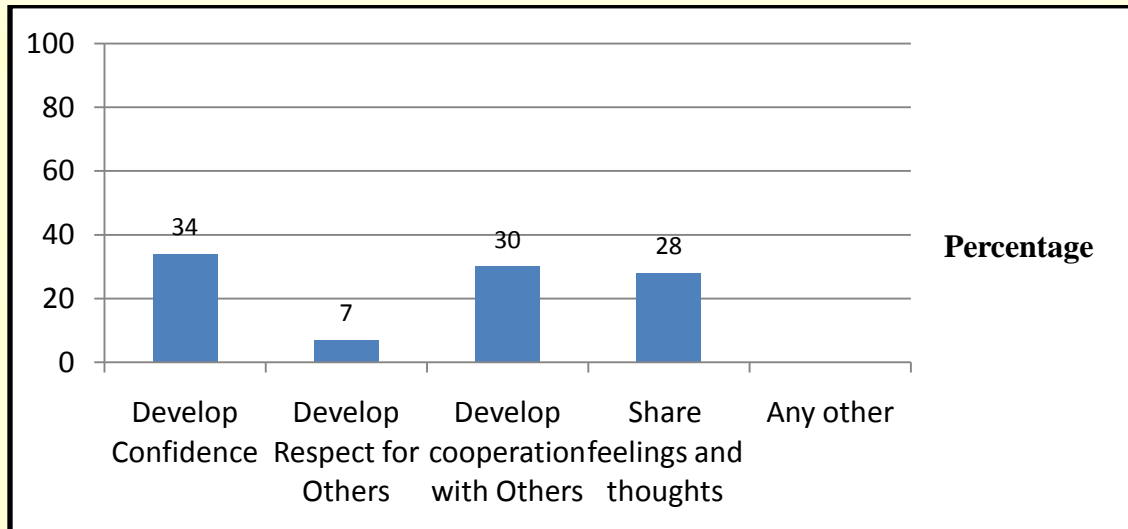


Figure No.3 shows effects of play therapy in physically disabled children that majority (34%) became confident, 30% developed cooperation with others, 29% able to share feelings and thoughts, and (7%) developed respect for others.

**Figure 4**

**Is every physically disabled child has some kind of behavioral problems?**

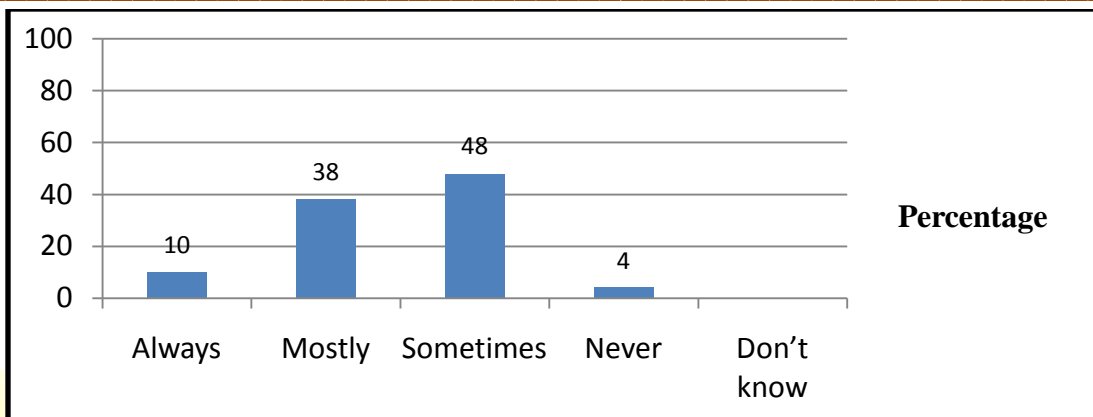


Figure No. 4 shows majority (48%) teachers said that sometimes every physically disabled child has behavioral problems, 38% said mostly, 10% said always and (4%) said never.

Figure 5

Type of the behavioral problems present in physically disabled children

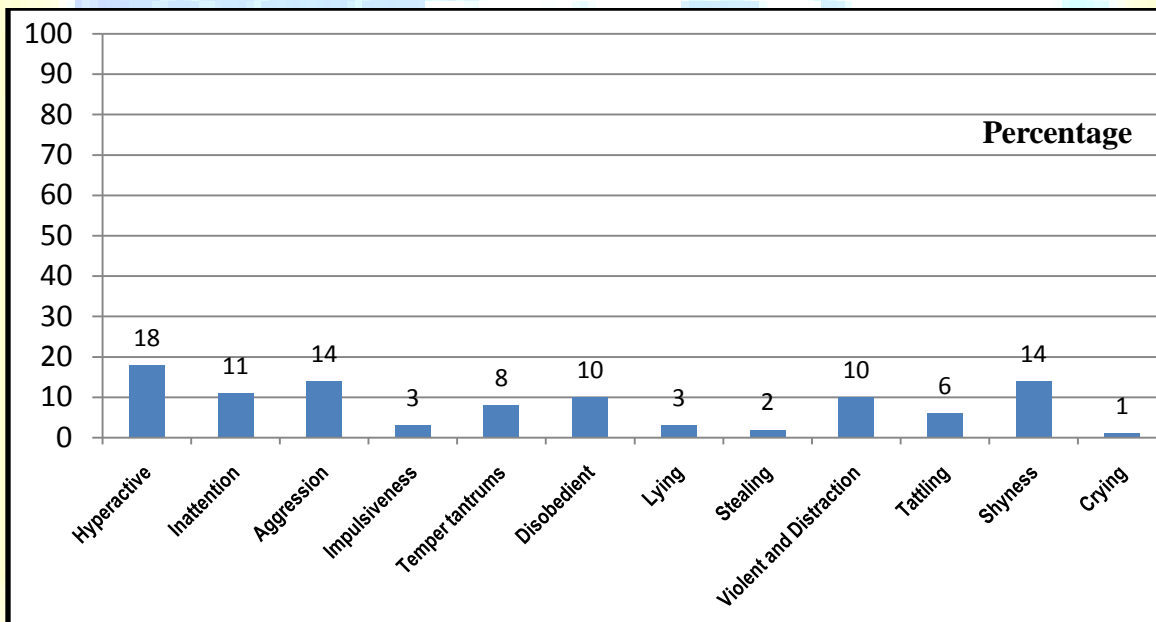


Figure No. 5 shows different types of behavioral problems in children. The result indicates that maximum (18%) were hyperactive, 14% were aggressive, 14% were shy, 11% were inattention, 10% were disobedient, 10% were violent and distracted, 8% were having temper tantrum, 6% were tattling, 3% were impulsive, 3% were telling lie, 2% were stealing and 1% was other (crying).

Figure 6

Opinions of teacher as if behavioral problems in children can be addressed by play therapy

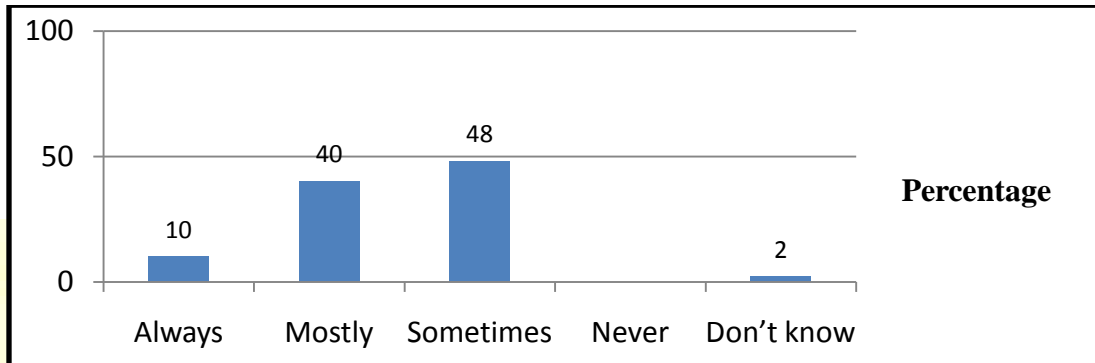


Figure No. 6 shows that majority (48%) teachers said that behavior problems of children can be addressed by play therapy sometimes, 40% said mostly, 10% said always and (2%) did not know about it.

Figure 7

Effectiveness of play therapy in different conditions

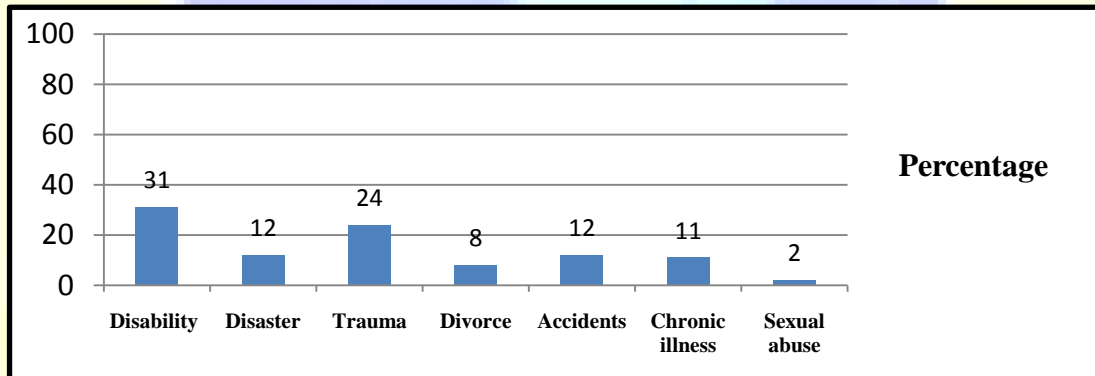


Figure No.7 shows majority (31%) teachers said that play therapy is effective in disability, 24% effective in trauma, 12% effective in disasters, 12% effective in accidents, 11% effective in chronic illness. and (2%) effective in other condition (sexual abuse).



Figure 8

**Physically disabled children have behavior problems**

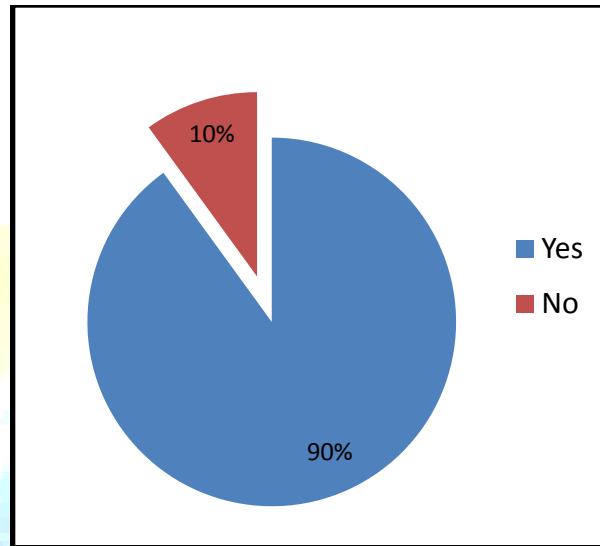


Figure No. 8 shows that (90%) parents said that children have behavior problems while 10% said they do not have behavior problems.

Figure 9

**Child's behavior is improved after taking play therapy**

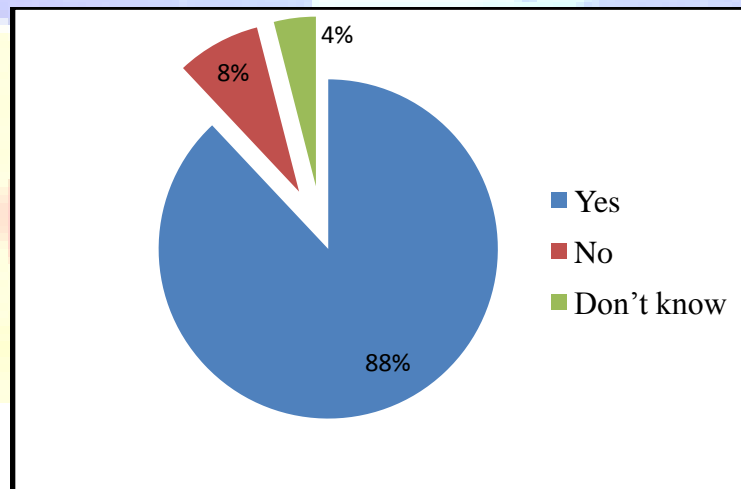


Figure No. 9 show majority (88%) parents said that their child behavior is improved after taking play therapy, 8% said their child behavior is not improved after taking play therapy and (4%) did not know about it.

Figure 10

## Cooperation of parents to child for play therapy

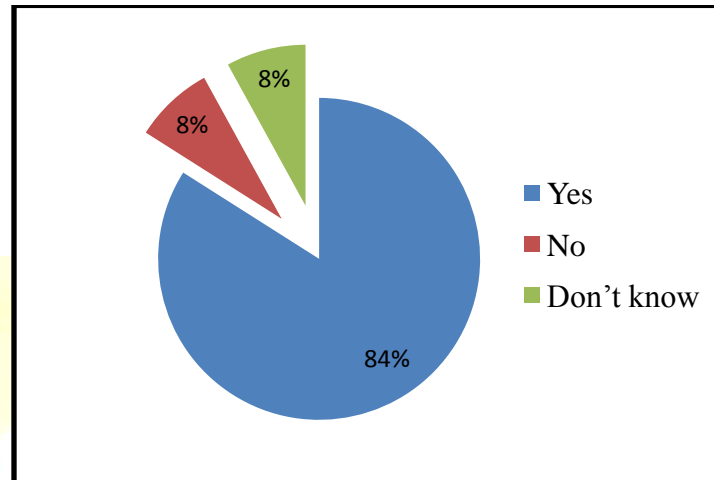


Figure No.10 show that majority (84%) parents said that they do cooperate to child for play therapy, 8% said they do not cooperate and (8%) did not know about it.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Many researchers have done work on play therapy effectiveness. The purpose of play therapy is to elucidate specific processes consisting enabling children to make sense of difficult life experiences by the play therapy intervention. A study was conducted by Cruickshank and Cowen (1948) on group play therapy with physically handicapped children in a special public day school in which five children were selected between the ages of 7 and 9 years and they took play therapy twice a week for seven weeks. Before and after play therapy sessions, teachers and parents wrote essay –type report noting the main behavior problems and any changes. This report revealed that three out of five children showed improvement.

Another study conducted by Ray et al (2001) completed a meta- analysis of 94 research studies for clinical effectiveness of play therapy. Total 20 different client groups were investigated involving difficulties like conduct disorder, anxiety, fear, speech and language difficulties, depression, and sexual abuse and post traumatic stress disorder. The results of the meta-analysis conducted large effect size ( $d=0.80$ ). The authors concluded that play therapy is an effective intervention for a broad range of children difficulties.

Bratton and Ray (2000) summarized further support in their review of the case study research in this field. They summarized 82 studies and presented the effectiveness of play therapy with several specific issues and population.

Britain, USA, Canada, and other developed countries offer Masters and PhD degrees for the research and development of play therapy. Some Universities also offer training courses for Masters and PhD research program (Tsai & Ray, 2011). However, online play therapy trainings and courses are also available.

Furthermore there is a big need for more research on play therapy intervention for solving different sorts of problem across gender, age, psychological and health issues etc.

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